

Testimony of
Stephen C. White
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Before the Committee on Commerce
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Introduced by:

Sen. Andrew Maynard, 18th District

Rep. Diana Urban, 43rd District

Re: Bill No. 714

Senator Lebeau and Representative Perone and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Mystic Seaport, *The Museum of America and the Sea*, regarding **H.B. 714, and act authorizing bonds of the State for Mystic Seaport Museum in Mystic, Connecticut.**

Mystic Seaport Museum: Our mission is to inspire an enduring connection to the American maritime experience through its collections and interactive programs. Founded in 1929, Mystic Seaport has been a national leader in the museum field and a driving force for tourism and economic development in Connecticut and New England. Internationally recognized for our peerless maritime collections, and celebrated for our exemplary stewardship, the Museum manages over 2,000,000 catalogued objects, including 524 watercraft. Educational programs are provided for students K-12, undergraduates through the Williams College/Mystic Seaport Maritime Studies Semester, and graduate students through the summer Munson Institute. We are supported by a membership of over 16,000 households, and welcome 270,000 visitors to our grounds annually.

Charles W. Morgan: We are most proud of our iconic vessel, the *Charles W. Morgan*, a national historic landmark vessel, the sole surviving wooden whaleship in the world, and the oldest commercial vessel afloat in the U.S. In 1941 the *Morgan* came to Mystic Seaport and virtually created the modern tourism industry in our region. In the context of the recreated 19th century seaport village, she established herself as the primary draw for the Museum and southern New England. Her national significance is borne out by the fact that more than 20 million visitors have walked across her deck since her arrival in Mystic. And thus, she has enabled Mystic Seaport to be an anchor for State and regional commerce, and for the past several decades, Mystic Seaport has remained one of the top 20 employers in southeastern Connecticut with over 300 employees for much of the year.

Vessels like the *Charles W. Morgan* require regular care and periodic restoration to maintain their structural integrity. The current round of restoration began in 2008, and the scope of the work led us to the conclusion that the *Morgan* could be seaworthy again for the first time in nearly a century. Post restoration, the vision for the *Charles W. Morgan* is for her to leave the static confines of Chubb's Wharf at Mystic Seaport and to go to sea again for a 38th voyage to important ports across southeastern New England, including New London, Newport, Vineyard Haven, New Bedford, Provincetown, and Boston (and perhaps

NYC and other CT ports). As such she will serve as a unique and recognizable flagship for the State of Connecticut. This event is the fullest manifestation of both the Museum's capabilities and the Governor's and State's commitment to tourism and to innovation. The *Morgan* will undoubtedly serve as a symbol for the Spirit of American Enterprise (the Voyage's tag line) both past and present.

Commerce: During her working life and her 37 world-wide voyages, she always returned profits to her owners, and we believe that she will return from her 38th voyage with profits for the State of Connecticut through national and international exposure. The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy states that "ocean related topics offer an effective tool to keep students interested in science, increase their awareness of the natural world, and boost their academic achievement in many areas." In recognition of this, last spring the State designated the 2013-2014 academic year as the *Year of the Charles W. Morgan* in Connecticut. Already this year, Mystic Seaport has received \$100,000 in private funds to promote educational outreach to 15 communities in northeastern Connecticut as part of this initiative. Of note, she will begin her voyage with a three week stay in June 2014 in New London as she is fitted out for the voyage. New London joins New Bedford, Nantucket, Provincetown, and San Francisco as one of the top five whaling ports in America. While in New London, she will be open, free of charge, for school children across the State linking curricular projects to authentic historical experiences, and also serve as a major draw to the New London waterfront, creating a positive impact on local economic development.

The total project cost for restoration and the 38th Voyage, including programming and exhibits, is \$12 million. To date, we have raised \$8.7 million, including \$500,000 from the State of Connecticut. The State's grant of \$500,000 this past summer has inspired an additional \$2.3 million in private gifts over the past six months from friends of the Museum, many of whom are Connecticut residents. **The restoration side of the project requires \$2.5 million for completion, and we are seeking \$2 million from the State to help close the funding gap to complete the project to its fullest potential.**

The restoration and 38th Voyage of the *Charles W. Morgan* will be the largest travelling exhibit a museum like Mystic Seaport has ever attempted. Mystic Seaport (as well as the State) will leverage the national exposure (i.e., TODAY Show, NY Times) and marketing opportunities to enhance key economic drivers which will strengthen our financial foundation and foster institutional sustainability and growth. Further, national media coverage will generate exponential tourism growth for the region, dramatically impacting hospitality interests and increasing tax revenues for the State. With the Morgan's launch this summer and the voyage in 2014, we anticipate an increase in attendance of 20% for 2013, 2014, and 2015 of which will have a most favorable corresponding impact on the regional economy.

For much of the 20th century, Mystic Seaport and the State of Connecticut have been active partners in promoting authentic learning experiences and tourism. Please continue that important tradition with support of this bill. Thank you!